Dear Councillor,

 Further to my email on 17 December, please see the attached slides which provide further information about Local Government Reorganisation and the Devolution Priority Programme.

 **Devolution Priority Programme - What are the proposals?**

As you will be aware, the White Paper sets out wide ranging proposals for major reform of the structure, functions and powers of local government. Key to the Government’s plans are the creation of strategic authorities, which will either be a foundation strategic authority (without a mayor) or a mayoral strategic authority (with a mayor). The Government wants to see every part of the country have an elected Mayor covering broad geographical areas, as has happened in places like Greater Manchester and the West Midlands. These authorities will be expected to be responsible for the strategic delivery of major infrastructure, transport, strategic planning, skills, economic development and health, and a number of other strategic areas through one council and across a larger area than the district and county council currently do. The White Paper does not define the geographical boundaries for such authorities, instead the Government is inviting proposals.

 Delivering this change across the country is a significant undertaking and the Government will facilitate devolution in phases, initially prioritising areas which are keen to move quickly. This is known as the Devolution Priority Programme. Upper tier authorities are being invited to submit proposals for strategic authorities,  by 10 January 2025. It is expected that proposals for the first wave of strategic authorities will also bring forward proposals for reorganisation. It is important to note that whilst the geography and governance of a strategic authority is the decision of upper tier authorities, it expected that there is support of the districts and boroughs for reorganisation proposals.

 **What does this mean for East Sussex and Rother?**

Leaders and Chief Executives in East Sussex met yesterday to discuss proposals for the creation of strategic authority and the implications of being part of the Devolution Priority Programme. ESCC will meet on 9 January to consider their response to government regarding devolution and reorganisation.  We will continue to engage closely on preferred options in advance of the 10 January deadline.

 Focusing more on the potential implications for Rother, specifically in relation to local government reorganisation, it is clear from the White Paper that the Government wants to see new unitary authorities created from existing counties and districts. These would sit within the broader strategic authority areas. In return for newly elected Mayors and unitary authorities, the Government will then further devolve powers, functions and services to local areas. As a rule of thumb, the Government is expecting any new unitary authority to be based on a population of at least 500,000

 **What are the timescales for these changes?**

If East Sussex is accepted as part of the Devolution Priority Programme, then it is likely that the County Elections next May will be cancelled. Instead, there would be Mayoral Elections in May 2026 with the intention that new arrangements will be in place for April 2027. For areas part of the first wave, this will mean proposals for reorganisation being submitted to Government by May 2025. This is extremely ambitious, and I understand there will be some flexibility regarding ‘go live’ dates. Over the period of transfer from Rother to any new authority it will be important we ensure the key services we provide are maintained and I expect the integration of services with those of other councils within a new unitary will take time to fully implement after ‘go live’.

**Keeping you to up to date**

This is as much as I know at present. As we work towards the first milestone of 10 January, I expect the pace will quicken significantly.

It is my intention to organise a member briefing early in the New Year.

Kind regards

Lorna

**Lorna Ford**

Chief Executive

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